

## The Index of Hero's Power and Nobility in Shakespearean Tragedy Drama: A Semiotic Study

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### Abstract

*This paper discusses a study that investigates the index of hero's power and nobility in Shakespearean tragedy dramas. Here, the discussion focuses on two works authored by William Shakespeare: "Macbeth" and "Othello". Objective of this study is to investigate the signs that give index of power and nobility in those two Shakespearean tragedy dramas. The study is done by analyzing Macbeth and Othello in the way of tracing the intrinsic elements or texts of them. All related dialogs and narrations (data source) in these dramas are analyzed in order to disclose the indexes of power and nobility in Shakespearean tragedy dramas. All analyses from each works are compared in order to determine if there are similar indexes or even distinction among those works in depicting the sense of power and nobility as Shakespearean dramas. As the result, it is found that these two dramas contain similar pattern of indexes that lead to the figuration of each hero's power and nobility in the dramas.*

**Keywords:** nobility, power, index, sign, Shakespearean tragedy drama

### Introduction

During the long reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1558-1603), the progress in the development of literary domain was very significant. The chief literary glory of this great age was its drama (Thornley and Robert, 1984: 35). That because this age showed its society patriotism, settlement in belief and social life, passion, and intellectual development. In this case, drama was considered to have capacity in combining thought, feeling, and movement of Elizabethan society. Furthermore, Samekto (1998: 24) stated that in this particular age, drama was no longer used for teaching religion and moral, but it had achieved an artistically level in which it tended to show the complexity of human life. Based on that, among all literary domains of this age, drama really became the most improved literary domain, and that culminated on the works of greatest English playwrights William Shakespeare.

According to L.G. Salinger in Bedford (1982: 16-17), by Shakespeare lifetime (1564-1616), the new humanist (influenced by classical Greek) culture matured during his youth. It was reflected in the Roman and Mediterranean settings of the drama, and also the characters of princes, wits, and gallants. In addition, the Elizabethan literary language, especially with professional writers like Shakespeare was addressed to a mixed public, more trained in listening than in reading, and more accustomed to group life than to privacy. Therefore, in order to entertain the society and to relate drama to society life, the common central theme of Elizabethan literature was the clash between individuals and the claims of social order.

During his lifetime, Shakespeare authored not less than thirty four dramas and two sonnets. According to Samekto (1998: 29-30), concerning on its kind, Shakespeare's works could be divided into three categories; tragedy, comedy, and history drama. Tragedy is a kind of drama in which the main character is encouraged by its own condition or weaknesses to the affliction, especially agony and ended by death. In this case, "Hamlet", "Othello", "King Lear", and "Macbeth" are considered as Shakespeare's greatest tragedies. Comedy is a kind of drama in which the characters belong to humorous situation, and ended with sense of happiness. "Midsummer Night's Dream", "As You Like It", "Twelfth Night", "Winter's Tale", and "The Tempest" are Shakespeare's most famous comedies. Meanwhile history drama is a kind of drama that depicts an era or a historical figure, and it could be tragedy or comedy. The examples of Shakespeare's history drama are "Julius Caesar", "Richard III", "Henry IV", and "Anthony and Cleopatra".

As explained previously, the new humanist culture influenced Shakespeare in creating his works. That is why, seeing the Element of his works, Roman and Mediterranean become the common settings of his dramas. In addition, Shakespeare's other elements that commonly found in his dramas are characters of princes (nobility), wits, and gallants. Besides the influence of classical Greek arts and works, that probably happened because of the

monarchy background of his nation and the situation of Europe in the sixteenth century that was dominated by kings. In Shakespeare's tragedy dramas, wit is absolutely rare or even never exists inside the content of the play. As Samekto stated before, the tragedies normally contain the sense of seriousness and sorrow, for Shakespearean in particular they would be dominantly colored by sense of nobility and power (gallant).

Related to that issue, this particular study is aimed to investigate how Shakespeare's works depict the sense of nobility and power through certain elements in his tragedy drama. In this case, there must be signs that lead to the figuration of those senses in Shakespearean tragedy dramas; therefore to approach the existence of signs in Shakespeare's tragedies is really essential to understand how the figuration of power and nobility senses is established. According to Pradopo (2012: 119), semiotic is a relevant study to deal with signs in literature, because it is the study of signs. In semiotic, sign has two aspects; signifier and signified. Signifier is a formal form that signs something so called signified, meanwhile signified is something that is signed by signifier, which means a meaning.

Furthermore, Pradopo (2012: 120) also stated that sign is divided into three categories including icon, index, and symbol. Icon is a sign that shows a natural relation between its signifier and signified, as example is tree's picture that signs the tree itself. Index is a sign that shows causal relation between its signifier and signified, as example is smoke that signs fire. Meanwhile symbol is a sign that shows there is no natural relation between its signifier and signified. Moreover, it also has an arbitrary relation between signifier and signified, in which the meaning of sign depends on the convention. For example is a symbol of "ibu" whereas it is determined by Indonesian convention, while English uses "mother" and French uses "la mere". The variation of signs for one meaning shows the arbitrariness in this particular case.

Related to the discussion, Pradopo also explains that index is the preferable one for literary research that uses semiotic approach. The signs that show causal relation would be able to understand certain element contained in a literary work. As an example, if a study aims to discuss the characterization of a doctor, so the investigation must be directed to figure out the signs that give index that certain character is a doctor such as the character always uses medical terms, tools, etc. Therefore, to synchronize the approach used in this particular study, the investigation done in this study is also intended to figure out the signs that give index of power and nobility in Shakespearean tragedy drama.

In order to gain more comprehensive result of study, the observation is done by analyzing two Shakespearean greatest tragedy dramas "*Othello*" and "*Macbeth*", so that the depiction of power and nobility indexes in Shakespearean drama could be seen more significantly. The study is done by analyzing those works in the way of tracing the intrinsic elements or texts of them. All related dialogs and narrations (data source) in these dramas are analyzed in order to disclose the indexes of power and nobility in Shakespearean tragedy dramas. All analyses from each works would be compared in order to determine if there are similar indexes or even distinction among those works in depicting the sense of power and nobility as Shakespearean dramas. Therefore, through this study it is hoped that indexes that trigger the figuration of power and nobility in Shakespearean Tragedy dramas could be understood comprehensively.

### Method

Since it a library research, this research is done by using descriptive qualitative method in which the data analyzed are in a form of texts (narrations and dialogues) in two primary data sources, William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and *Othello*. The data gotten are processed and analyzed based on indexical meaning in semiotic approach in order to reveal indexes that trigger the figuration of power and nobility in those two Shakespearean tragedy dramas.

### Discussion

Before going to the discussion, first thing to be informed is that the material object used in this observation is William Shakespeare's dramas that have already been formed to electronic text series. Therefore, the observation is done by having a close reading to those related texts in order to accomplish the objective of this discussion. Related to that, the discussion in this paper is divided into two discussions. The first is discussion of index of power and the second is discussion of index of nobility in Shakespearean tragedy dramas.

### Index of Hero's Power in Shakespeare's "*Macbeth*" and "*Othello*"

As explained previously, for Shakespearean tragedy dramas in particular they would be dominantly colored by sense of power (gallant). Most of the senses of power are found to be identically referred to the depiction of male main characters (heroes) in Shakespearean tragedy dramas. That is of course not surprising, since all titles of Shakespearean tragedy dramas are taken from the name of hero in each drama, so the focus of any significant aspect must be pointed out to the main character in the story. However, that is not what would be discussed in this study, because basically this study is intended to seek the indexes (signs) that lead to the power figuration upon heroes in "*Macbeth*" and "*Othello*". Therefore, some analyses are done toward particular texts that are relevant to this study from those four dramas.

In accordance, first of all, some quotations are taken in order to seek out the indexes of power that are attached upon hero in *Macbeth*:

**SOLDIER.**

.....;  
For **brave** Macbeth,--well he deserves that name,--  
Disdaining fortune, with his brandish'd steel,  
Which smok'd with bloody execution,  
Like **valor's minion**,  
.....

**ROSS.**

.....,  
Curbing his lavish spirit: and, to conclude,  
The **victory** fell on us.  
.....

**DUNCAN.**

What he hath lost, noble Macbeth hath won.  
(Project Gutenberg E-text of *Macbeth* by Shakespeare, 1998)

Based on those quotations, it seems that Macbeth as a hero in the drama is depicted to have some characterizations that are implicitly explained by those dialogs. Based on the first dialog, it is found that Captain Macbeth is portrayed as *brave* character in the war that their kingdom faces till Macbeth is considered as *valor's minion*. Related to the first dialog, the second and the third dialogs try to emphasize what has done by Macbeth in the war, the *victory* fell on Macbeth's troops. Afterwards, according to the story King Duncan of Scotland bestows him to be Thane of Cawdor.

In this case, it could be seen how significant actually the power of Macbeth depicted in this drama. From the quotations explained above, there are some indexes that are found related to the figuration of Macbeth's power in this drama such as brave, valor's minion, and victory. In *Macbeth*, those three signs are able to establish a power figuration to Macbeth character, because basically there is a causal relation between Macbeth's power figuration and those three signs. Here, the bravery that is represented by "brave sign" and "valor's minion sign" in which these two signs raise an emergence of such a *power* that support him to give "victory" for his kingdom. Accordingly, in the other word the three signs found in this drama could be considered as the indexes that sign an existence of power upon Macbeth character. The existence of power here is seen from Macbeth's *bravery*, *valor*, and his success as a soldier in giving *victory* for his kingdom from the war he face.

Second of all, the analysis is directed to *Othello*. In accordance, some quotations are taken in order to seek out the indexes of power that are attached upon hero in *Othello*:

**MONTANO.**

.....  
As well to see the vessel that's come in  
As to throw out our eyes for **brave** Othello,  
.....

**OTHELLO.**

Come, let us to the castle.  
News, friends; our wars are done, **the Turks are drown'd**.  
How does my old acquaintance of this isle?  
.....

**HERALD.**

It is Othello's pleasure, our noble and **valiant** general,  
that upon certain tidings now arrived, **importing the mere  
perdition of the Turkish fleet**, every man put himself into  
**triumph**;  
(Project Gutenberg E-text of Othello by Shakespeare, 1998)

Based on those quotations, it seems that Othello as a hero in the drama is depicted to have also some characterizations that are implicitly explained by its dialogs. Based on the first dialog, it is found that General Othello is portrayed as *brave* character and all people wait for his arrival from the war they face against the Turkish in Cyprus, in addition this finding also supported by the third dialog that portrays Othello as *valiant* general. Related to those findings, the second and the third dialogs try to emphasize that Othello's leadership has been able to defeat Turkish fleet and give the *triumph* to his people and based on that Othello is bestowed as a noble general for Cyprus people.

In this case, it could be seen how significant actually the power of Othello depicted in this drama. From the quotations explained above, there are some indexes that are found related to the figuration of Othello's power in this drama such as brave, valiant, and triumph. As in *Macbeth*, in *Othello* those three signs are able to establish a power figuration to Othello character, because of the causal relation between Othello's power figuration and those three signs. Here, the bravery that is represented by "brave sign" and "valiant sign", in which these two signs raise an emergence of such a *power* that support him to give "triumph" for his people. Accordingly, in the other word the three signs found in this drama could be considered as the indexes that sign an existence of power upon Othello character. The existence of power here is seen from Othello's *bravery*, *valiant leadership*, and his success in giving *triumph* for Cyprus people from the war against Turkish.

Based on those analyses, there is an interesting finding between those two dramas. According to some indexes found in these two dramas, it is also found that *Macbeth* and *Othello* have the same pattern in figuring their hero's power out. In order to give clearer picture of the pattern, here a table is created to highlight all indexes of each hero's power in those dramas:

No.	Drama & Hero	Index 1	Index 2	Index 3
1.	<i>Macbeth</i> : Macbeth	Brave	Valor	Victory (by defeating enemy)
2.	<i>Othello</i> : Othello	Brave	Valiant	Triumph (by defeating enemy)

Table 1: Indexes of Hero's Power

The table shows clearer picture of indexes that lead to the figuration of hero's power in *Macbeth* and *Othello*. From the table, it is seen how *Macbeth* and *Othello* contain the same pattern in figuring their hero's power out. Each drama has index of bravery that refers to their hero's power who dares to face dangerous come from the enemy. In addition, each drama also has index of gallantry to show their hero's power that is represented by valor (*Macbeth*) and valiant (*Othello*) in which those two indexes have the same level of meaning which also refer to their hero's power to fight against the enemy. And the last similar pattern is the ability of each hero to defeat their enemy which is represented by index of victory (*Macbeth*) and triumph (*Othello*) which they have the same meaning (success or winning). Therefore, after finding all indexes that show the existence of hero's power in *Macbeth* and *Othello*, it is also found that those two dramas have the same pattern of indexes to establish the figuration of hero inside of the story.

## 2.2. Index of Hero's Nobility in Shakespeare's "*Macbeth*" and "*Othello*"

As explained previously, Shakespearean tragedy dramas is also dominantly colored by sense of nobility. As like as previous discussion, most of the senses of nobility are found to be identically referred to the depiction of male main characters (heroes) in Shakespearean tragedy dramas particularly in *Macbeth* and *Othello*. Therefore, to disclose the indexes of nobility in those dramas, first of all some quotations are taken in order to seek out the indexes of nobility that are attached upon hero in *Macbeth*:

**DUNCAN.**

What he hath lost, **noble** Macbeth hath won.

.....

**ROSS.**

And, for an earnest of a greater honor,

He bade me, from him, call thee **Thane of Cawdor**:

In which addition, hail, most worthy thane,  
For it is thine.

.....

**DUNCAN.**

This **castle** hath a pleasant seat: the air  
Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself  
Unto our gentle senses.

(Project Gutenberg E-text of Macbeth by Shakespeare, 1998)

Based on those quotations, it seems that Macbeth as a hero in the drama is depicted to have particular identity that is implicitly explained by those dialogs. Based on the first dialog, it is found that Macbeth is called as *noble* Macbeth by King Duncan. For English people, noble means a person of the highest social group in Britain, in which this person belongs to a high social rank in a society, especially by birth. In this case, word noble is considered as a sign to show the nobility of Macbeth in the story. Related to the first dialog, the second dialog strengthens the position of Macbeth's identity in the story, because according to the dialog it is found that the next sign of nobility is seen when Macbeth is bestowed as *Thane of Cawdor* in which it is the honorary title given by the King because of Macbeth's merit for the kingdom. Meanwhile, the third dialog tries to emphasize another sign that depicts the nobility of Macbeth by showing where he lives. It is found that Macbeth lives in a castle in which for British society the one or family that usually lives in a castle is a noble family. Therefore, a castle depiction is also seen as a sign of Macbeth's nobility.

In this case, it could be seen how significant actually the nobility of Macbeth depicted in this drama. From the quotations explained above, there are some indexes that are found related to the figuration of Macbeth's nobility in this drama such as noble, Thane of Cawdor, and castle. In *Macbeth*, those three signs are able to establish a nobility figuration to Macbeth character, because basically there is a causal relation between Macbeth's nobility figuration and those three signs. Here, the nobility is represented by "noble sign" and "Thane of Cawdor sign" in which these two signs raise an emergence of such identification of *nobility* that identify who is Macbeth in the view of society inside the story. In addition, "castle sign" also strengthens the identity of Macbeth as a noble man character inside of the drama. Accordingly, in the other word the three signs found in this drama could be considered as the indexes that sign the nobility upon Macbeth character. The identification of nobility here is seen from Macbeth's noble title and status, also the castle where he lives as a noble man.

Second of all, the analysis is directed to *Othello*. In accordance, some quotations are taken in order to seek out the indexes of nobility that are attached upon hero in *Othello*:

**HERALD.**

It is Othello's pleasure, our **noble** and valiant general,  
that upon certain tidings now arrived, importing the mere  
perdition of the Turkish fleet, every man put himself into  
triumph; ..... much was his pleasure should be proclaimed. All offices are open; and  
there is full liberty of feasting from this present hour of five till the bell have told eleven. Heaven  
bless the isle of Cyprus and our **noble general**  
Othello!

.....

**OTHELLO.**

These letters give, Iago, to the pilot;  
And by him do my duties to the senate:  
That done, I will be walking on the works;  
Repair there to me.

**IAGO.**

Well, my good **lord**, I'll do't.

.....

**OTHELLO.**

Come, let us to **the castle**--  
News, friends; our wars are done, the Turks are drown'd.  
How does my old acquaintance of this isle?  
(Project Gutenberg E-text of Othello by Shakespeare, 1998)

Based on those quotations, it seems that Macbeth as a hero in the drama is depicted to also have particular identity that is implicitly explained by those dialogs. Based on the first dialog, it is found that Othello is called as *noble* general by people in Cyprus. As explained previously, noble means a person of the highest social group. In this case, word noble is considered as a sign to show the nobility of Othello in the story. Related to the first dialog, the second dialog also strengthens the position of Othello's identity in the story, because according to the dialog it is found that the next sign of nobility is seen when Othello is called as *lord* in which it is the honor given by his people. Meanwhile, the third dialog also tries to emphasize another sign that depicts the nobility of Othello by showing where he lives. It is found that Othello lives in a castle in which it is where noble family usually lives in. Therefore, a castle depiction is also seen as a sign of Othello's nobility.

In this case, it could be seen how significant actually the nobility of Othello depicted in this drama. From the quotations explained above, there are some indexes that are found related to the figuration of Othello's nobility in this drama such as noble, lord, and castle. In *Othello*, those three signs are able to establish a nobility figuration to Othello character, because basically there is a causal relation between Othello's nobility figuration and those three signs. Here, the nobility is represented by "noble sign" and "lord sign" in which these two signs raise an emergence of such identification of *nobility* that identify who is Othello in the view of society inside the story. In addition, "castle sign" also strengthens the identity of Othello as a noble man character inside of the drama. Accordingly, in the other word the three signs found in this drama could be considered as the indexes that sign the nobility upon Othello character. The identification of nobility here is seen from Othello's noble title and status, also the castle where he lives as a noble man.

Based on those analyses, the same like previous analysis there is an interesting finding between those two dramas. According to some indexes found in these two dramas, it is also found that *Macbeth* and *Othello* have the same pattern in figuring their hero's nobility out. In order to give clearer picture of the pattern, here a table is created to highlight all indexes of each hero's nobility in those dramas:

No.	Drama & Hero	Index 1	Index 2	Index 3
1.	<i>Macbeth</i> : Macbeth	Noble	Thane of Cawdor	Castle
2.	<i>Othello</i> : Othello	Noble	Lord	Castle

Table 2: Indexes of Hero's Nobility

The table shows clearer picture of indexes that lead to the figuration of hero's nobility in *Macbeth* and *Othello*. From the table, it is seen how *Macbeth* and *Othello* contain the same pattern in figuring their hero's nobility out. Each drama has index of noble that refers to their hero's nobility who has high rank in the social stratification. In addition, each drama also has index of honorary title to show their hero's nobility that is represented by Thane of Cawdor (*Macbeth*) and lord (*Othello*) in which those two indexes have the same level of meaning which also refer to their hero's nobility who has honorary title in the social life. And the last similar pattern is the place where they live in which is represented by index of castle both in *Macbeth* and *Othello* whereas it is the place of noble family usually live in. Therefore, after finding all indexes that show the existence of hero's nobility in *Macbeth* and *Othello*, it is also found that those two dramas have the same pattern of indexes to establish the figuration of hero inside of the story.

## Conclusion

Based on the explanations that have been described previously, there are some important things that can be inferred and understood. Firstly, there is an interesting finding between those two dramas. According to some indexes found in these two dramas, it is found that *Macbeth* and *Othello* have the same pattern in figuring their hero's power out. Each drama has index of bravery that refers to their hero's power who dares to face dangerous come from the enemy. In addition, each drama also has index of gallantry to show their hero's power that is represented by valor (*Macbeth*) and valiant (*Othello*) in which those two indexes have the same level of meaning which also refer to their hero's power to fight against the enemy. And the last similar pattern is the ability of each hero to defeat their enemy which is represented by index of victory (*Macbeth*) and triumph (*Othello*) which they have the same meaning (success or winning). Therefore, after finding all indexes that show the existence of hero's power in *Macbeth* and *Othello*, it is concluded that those two dramas have the same pattern of indexes to establish the figuration of hero inside of the story.

Secondly, it is also found that *Macbeth* and *Othello* have the same pattern in figuring their hero's nobility out. Each drama has index of noble that refers to their hero's nobility who has high rank in the social stratification. In addition, each drama also has index of honorary title to show their hero's nobility that is

represented by Thane of Cawdor (*Macbeth*) and lord (*Othello*) in which those two indexes have the same level of meaning which also refer to their hero's nobility who has honorary title in the social life. And the last similar pattern is the place where they live in which is represented by index of castle both in *Macbeth*) and *Othello* whereas it is the place of noble family usually live in. Therefore, after finding all indexes that show the existence of hero's nobility in *Macbeth* and *Othello*, it is concluded that those two dramas have the same pattern of indexes to establish the figuration of hero inside of the story.

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